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Viewing cable 10OTTAWA29, Canada's Conservative Government and its Arctic Focus

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
10OTTAWA29	2010-01-21 16:52	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN	Embassy Ottawa

Appears in these articles:

<http://aptn.ca/pages/news/2011/05/11/while-harper-talked-tough-with-nato-on-arctic-u-s-believed-pm-all-bark-no-bite/>

VZCZCXYZ0001
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHOT #0029/01 0211652
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 211652Z JAN 10
FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0294
INFO RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN 0001
RUEHGA/AMCONSUL CALGARY
RUEHHA/AMCONSUL HALIFAX
RUEHHE/AMEMBASSY HELSINKI 0003
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0006
RUEHMT/AMCONSUL MONTREAL
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 0006
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
RUEHRK/AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK 0001
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0008
RUEHVC/AMCONSUL VANCOUVER

id: 244740
date: 1/21/2010 16:52
refid: 10OTTAWA29
origin: Embassy Ottawa
classification: CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN

destination:
header:
VZCZCXYZ0001
RR RUEHWEB
DE RUEHOT #0029/01 0211652
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 211652Z JAN 10
FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0294
INFO RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN 0001
RUEHGA/AMCONSUL CALGARY
RUEHHA/AMCONSUL HALIFAX
RUEHHE/AMEMBASSY HELSINKI 0003
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0006
RUEHMT/AMCONSUL MONTREAL
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 0006
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
RUEHRK/AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK 0001
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0008
RUEHVC/AMCONSUL VANCOUVER

----- header ends -----

C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 000029

NOFORN

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/EX, WHA/CAN, OES/OA

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PASS TO APP WINNIPEG

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PASS TO AMCONSUL QUEBEC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/01/20

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [SENV](#) [CA](#) [XQ](#)

SUBJECT: Canada's Conservative Government and its Arctic Focus

CLASSIFIED BY: Eric Benjaminson, Economic Minister-Counselor, State Department, Embassy Ottawa; REASON: 1.4(D)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary: Since the day after his initial election victory in January 2006, Canadian PM Stephen Harper has continually played up his government's commitment to defending Canada's "North" (the landmass above 60 degrees North latitude represents about 40% of Canada's total territory, but only has about 100,000 people) and has endeavored to make concern for the Arctic a prime feature of the Conservative political brand. The culmination of that effort was the release of the government's "Northern Strategy" in the summer of 2009. Thus far, the government's ardor for the "North" has translated into only a modest array of actions that have an impact on American and other foreign interests: most significantly an extension of the reach of its pollution protection rules in the Arctic, from 100 nautical miles (nm) to 200 nm. To make further progress in its efforts to "enhance Arctic sovereignty," the government likely needs to leverage the stature, policies, and resources of the United States, the one Arctic neighbor whose national interests are most closely aligned with, Canada's. Numerous observers of the Canadian political scene caution, however, that while Arctic sovereignty is tried and tested as an election issue, the promises made are seldom implemented. End summary.

Conservatives make concern for "The North" part of their political brand...and it works

[1](#)2. (U) Beginning in mid-2004, the then-minority government of Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin commenced a rhetorical battle with Denmark over a two-decade old claim to uninhabited Hans Island between Greenland and Ellesmere Island, which culminated in July 2005 when the Canadian Defence Minister and several soldiers actually landed on Hans Island and hoisted the maple leaf flag (they also left a bottle of Canadian whisky). Danish-Canadian tensions were reduced to a simmer by a September 2005 joint statement, but the government's Arctic sovereignty statements of 2004 and the Canadian military efforts the following summer set the stage for Conservative Party leader Stephen Harper to make the North an election issue in the campaign that began in December

[1](#)2005. "The single most important duty of the federal government is to protect and defend our national sovereignty," he declared in stump speeches invoking "...new and disturbing reports [sic] of American nuclear submarines passing through Canadian waters without obtaining the permission of -- or even notifying -- the Canadian government." Candidate Harper's Arctic plan focused on the construction and deployment of three new armed heavy icebreaking ships, an Arctic Ocean sensor system, as well as the eventual construction of a deepwater port in Nunavut to guard the Arctic waters. The message seemed to resonate with the electorate; the

Conservatives formed the new government in 2006, but failed to win a majority.

¶3. (U) Once elected, Harper hit the ground running with frosty rhetoric; on January 26, 2006 Harper (who was still only Prime Minister - designate) used his first post-election press conference to respond to the United States Ambassador's restatement the prior day of the longstanding U.S. position on the Northwest passage. Harper firmly declared that "...the Canadian government will defend our sovereignty, ...and it is the Canadian people we get our mandate from, not the Ambassador of the United States."

¶4. (C/NF) PM Harper made a focus on the North a prime feature of the Conservative political brand again in the October 2008 general election. In addition, in his government's annual budgets and in public announcements, he has continued to accentuate the focus on the North. For example, in its budgets over the past four years, the government announced a series of significant Arctic expenditures, including: C\$750 million for a new Polar-class ice breaker to replace its sole heavy icebreaker, (which is 40 years old and scheduled to be decommissioned in 2017); millions for mapping of the Extended Continental Shelf and mapping of northern natural resources; and, most recently, a C\$250 million dollar economic development agency focused on Canada north of the 60th parallel. The culmination of the branding effort was the release of the government's "Northern Strategy" in the summer of 2009. A consolidation of previous Conservative policy pronouncements, the Strategy largely reflects long-standing Canadian Arctic shibboleths (Enhance Arctic Sovereignty; Promote Social and Economic Development; Protect the Environment; Improve Northern Governance and give greater authority to Northerners) to which previous Canadian governments have periodically given voice. The persistent high public profile which this government has accorded "Northern Issues" and the Arctic is, however, unprecedented and reflects the PM's views that "the North has never been more important to our country" - although one could perhaps paraphrase to state "the North has never been more important to our Party." (Comment: The opposition parties have not developed policies on Canada's role in the Arctic beyond generalities, defaulting "ownership" of a robust, rhetorical northern policy to the Conservatives that dovetails with party's broader priorities of rebuilding the Canadian Forces and enhancing Canada's international role". End Comment).

¶5. (U) To underscore his government's commitment to the Arctic, the PM has also visited the Arctic every summer since taking office while holding occasional cabinet meetings in the territorial capitals. In the latest example: as the G8 host in 2010, Canada has chosen to convene the G8 Finance Ministers' meeting in Iqaluit on Baffin Island...in February.

¶6. (C/NF) The government has also taken steps to amend a few key pieces of legislation to enhance its ability to control shipping in the North. In 2009, new authorities came into force that extended Canada's regulations for pollution violations all the way to the 200 nautical mile EEZ limit. A second proposal that would mandate all ships destined for Canada's Arctic waters to report to Canadian authorities has not yet been finalized in regulation. To date, the changes to the shipping rules are the only efforts that have had an impact on American and other foreign interests. The results of Canada's submission of a claim in 2013 for an Extended Continental Shelf under the United Nations Convention on the Law Of the Sea (UNCLOS) will also have an impact on Canada's neighbors. But, at this juncture, for Canada to advance its "sovereignty" interests there is a need to focus on bilateral and multilateral partnerships with its Arctic neighbors.

Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy

¶7. (U) According to Foreign Minister Cannon, "our foreign policy is a reflection of our domestic policy." To that end, "through the international dimension of our Northern Strategy-our Arctic foreign policy-we will protect our environmental heritage, promote economic and social development, exercise our sovereignty in this vital region and encourage more effective international governance". Moreover, in March 2009, when FM Cannon unveiled Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy in the Yukon, he declared that his "utmost priority" is to further strengthen Canada's bilateral engagement with Arctic states. He stated that "The United States is our premier partner in the Arctic," that "we have many shared interests and common purposes-in environmental stewardship, search and rescue, safety, security and sustainable resource development," and that he was looking forward to a more enhanced level of cooperation on Arctic issues with the United States. He noted that this would include

exploring "ways to pursue a common agenda," starting in 2013, as Canada and subsequently the United States chair the Arctic Council. He delivered the same speech in April 2009 at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC, further adding in his speech that he had discussed opportunities for enhanced cooperation on shared Arctic interests when he had met with Secretary Clinton earlier that day. In November 2009, during a speech in Toronto to the Economic Club of Canada, the Foreign Minister exclaimed that "Canada, with allies like the United States, is well-placed to take a leadership position in the face of the new challenges and opportunities in the Arctic." Interestingly, while taking questions after the speech, FM Cannon refused to be drawn into any discussion of difference with the United States over the Northwest Passage even when pressed, and instead chose to emphasize Arctic cooperation with the U.S.

18. (C/NF) Comment: Canada places great import on its Arctic partnership with the United States and at this juncture the Conservatives in particular see special value in enhancing that partnership. Not only is that partnership materially significant for Canada, which benefits greatly from American resources invested in Arctic science and in defense infrastructure , but also Canada has much to gain from leveraging the stature and standing of the United States. Among the Arctic coastal states (and perhaps among all countries) Canada and the United States typically have the most closely aligned policy interests and generally share a common viewpoint on international law and common objectives in multilateral fora (such as the Arctic Council). From Canada's point of view, if the two countries can find bilateral common-ground on Arctic issues, the chance for Canadian success is much greater than going it alone against the interests of other countries or groups of countries.

19. (C/NF) Comment Continued: Numerous observers of the Canadian political scene caution, however, that while Arctic sovereignty is tried and tested as an election issue, the promises made are seldom implemented (the armed ice-breakers and ocean sensors that candidate Harper promised in the 2006 election have been forgotten ; what will be the fate of the three-quarter billion dollar ice-breaker?). That the PM's public stance on the Arctic may not reflect his private, perhaps more pragmatic, priorities, however, was evident in the fact that during several hours together with Ambassador Jacobson on January 7 and 8, which featured long and wide-ranging conversations, the PM did not once mention the Arctic. End Comment.

JACOBSON